
Don't hesitate, now is the time to order calf ear tags

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Anyone associated with agriculture can appreciate the buildup of clouds on the horizon. The slow progressive change in both sight and feel certainly causes a feeling of uncertainty, if not outright worry. It is at times like this that the saying it feels like rain may have originated.

Anyone familiar with weather realizes there are two sides to every coin. Rain for one operation may very well mean hail for the next. A gentle watering in one county could be a gusher in the next.

Today, those in the cattle industry are viewing the much-discussed potential changes in animal identification with the same sense of concern. The uncertainty has many concerned, as the details of the process are discussed. The lack of answers to the many questions about tracking cattle, intense record systems, mandated concepts and an unclear definition of system backwash is a situation that could make anyone nervous. The air has gotten even thicker with the addition of age and source verification.

These processes often times are referred to rather lightly, but, frankly, the impact of these proposed changes are quite distant from the current way of doing business in the beef industry.

The beef industry is a visual-based industry requiring quick response and a good dose of wit. It is reminiscent of the early to mid-60s.

The 60s were a period for the beef industry not much different than today. Rooms were full of frustration and there was deep sentiment on the value of performance records in general. Lines were drawn, defensive strategy embedded and the discussion commenced with many still stinging from the revelation that successful cattle operations actually could engage in the legal practice of cross-breeding.

Tracking performance records are no different from tracking cattle in general, except a few more data points are kept. The general principal requires cattle identification and reputable longevity data on the ear tags. In retrospect, the topic of discussion was not as difficult as the

intensity of merging personalities.

Many respected individuals who were very opinionated, but marginally informed, were ready to do battle for the sake of a breed or group. At that time in history, the concept of performance being removed from the holdings of one's eye and transferred to data in a mathematical process was very disturbing to many. The truth is, there still are those individuals and elements within the cattle industry for which data collection, and the concept of cross-breeding, are disturbing.

However, in the world of facts and truth, concepts and programs based on scientific fact and function survive. The Beef Improvement Federation was conceived, and is functioning and evolving, but the storm clouds are growing. The technology people are rapidly deploying, the data people encrypting, the governmental people regulating, the academic people expounding, the internationalists pondering, the association types rallying and the coffee shop talk proliferating. The cloud is getting blacker, the type that at least turns your head with one eye on the storm cellar.

One thing is for sure. As a producer, the climate is changing and the outcome is unclear. However, it looks like a little preparation may be needed and survival may very well mean an offensive move.

The pen is grabbed, the order blank filled, so the ear tags should be here next week and then the record processing begins.

May you find all your USAIP ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0233.

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